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*The Desirableness of the Christian
Faith illustrated and applied.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached at the
Triennial Visitation
OF THE
Right Reverend FATHER in GOD
T H O M A S
LORD BISHOP of *SARUM*,

Held at READING,
On *Thursday, August 30th. 1744.*

By WILLIAM DODWELL M. A.
Rector of *Shottesbrook, Berks.*

Published at the Request of his LORDSHIP.

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I PET. I. 8.

*In whom, tho' now, Ye see Him not,
yet Believing, Ye rejoyce with Joy
unspeakable and full of Glory.*

THE Desire of Happiness is so strongly implanted in Us, It has so deep a Foundation both in Nature and Reason, that One should be apt, under a close and unprejudiced Attention to it, to imagine, that the best and noblest Prospect of it should almost necessarily influence Mens Faith and Practice; that They should be desirous of believing a System, which promises an Eternal Happiness, and equally studious to perform the Conditions of attaining it. But if We descend from Contemplation to Fact, if, from what We might reasonably expect, We turn our Thoughts to what we actually see; The Principles and Practices of Mankind give Us a very different, a very melancholy Prospect. Their Defects however and Miscarriages in Practice, tho' far from defensible, are yet easy enough to be accounted for. The

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same urgent Desire of Happiness makes them either overlook or wilfully neglect a more important future Interest for the Sake of a present and more immediate Pleasure. There is some Temptation at least, some imaginary Appearance of Satisfaction in these Cases, and They are far from chusing Evil as such, or for its own Sake. But our Speculative Infidels seem to have arisen even to this unaccountable unnatural Pitch, and to triumph seriously in such a deplorable Scheme, as, One would think, must terrify all serious considerate Persons. Our glorious Faith is renounced, and with an Appearance too of great Satisfaction, for a Perswasion full of real Horror and Mortification, and the Professors of Christianity are even insulted and ridiculed, for being willing to acknowledge their own Title to an happy Immortality. Yet if This be not a Truth, It is such an Error, as We have certainly a natural Prejudice in Favour of, and therefore were the Advocates for unassisted Reason guided in Earnest even by That only, yet the least They could impartially have done, had been to express with Concern, that They could not acquiesce in the Evidence of so desirable a Creed, as We Christians profess. But on the contrary, Infidelity is made Matter of Mirth and

and Triumph. They rejoyce, or at least profess to do so, in having, as They think, discerned the insufficient Foundations of that Revelation, on which the Pardon of all our Sins, the Security of all our Hopes and our Title to everlasting Happiness depend. But is This at the lowest, on their own Principles, if I may call them such, a Matter of Sport and Satisfaction? or when considered by a Christian, Does It call for our Pity rather, or our Indignation, to see Men taking Pleasure in such miserable Principles, and exulting as if They had made a Discovery of great Consequence to the Benefit and Welfare of Mankind? The Illustration of our better Hopes will be both an agreeable and a profitable Subject of Meditation, for in the Result the Whole Strength of Infidelity depends on the contrary Supposition. It is not by mere Speculation and Argument, that We can expect to recover Those to our Holy Faith, who were never tempted and seduced from it by any Strength of Argument. The Evidences of Religion have been a thousand Times proved and demonstrated, and do and ever will stand unanswered by them. Their Cavils at Scripture Difficulties have received distinct and satisfactory Solutions, and have indeed been answered to a surprising

prizing Degree of Clearness, considering the Distance of Time We stand at from their Original Promulgation. The only real Temptation therefore to Loose Principles lies in this, that Men flatter Themselves, that the Disbelief of Religion is a comfortable Thought, and that They may enjoy Themselves and their Pleasures more truly and satisfactorily under this Refuge, than under the Acknowledgment of the Christian Faith. It cannot therefore be an unserviceable Work to detect this Error also; to shew that our Religion is as well an amiable System as a certain Truth, and that the Delight and Comfort even of our present Station may and can only be provided for by the Influence of the Precepts and Promises of the Gospel. And We cannot take Occasion to represent this from a more emphatical Expression, or more convincing Exigence, than That which the Text sets before Us, *In whom* says St. Peter, Speaking of the Author and Finisher of our Faith, *In whom, tho' now Ye see Him not, yet Believing, Ye rejoyce with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory.*

It was addressed by the Apostle to Those, who were under the trying Circumstances of Persecution for this very Profession, and yet even here He represents it as the Foundation
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of such Joy, as could not be equalled either in Kind or Degree by any other Perswasion. The Christian Faith in the ordinary Course of Things did plainly provide for their better Security from all Dangers, and by the beneficial Virtues, which It prescribed, was calculated for Social and Personal Prosperity and Delight; and where extraordinary Violence and Calamities interrupted the natural Good Effects of such Heavenly Duties, there its future Felicities were applicable with greater Force, would enable Them to triumph under Affliction, and convert their heaviest Sorrows into a Subject of Joy and Consolation.

The Whole Passage is full of this grateful Spirit of Triumph and Exultation on a View of the Blessings of the Evangelical Dispensation, and that best Support, which It would afford them in the worst Circumstances. *Blessed, says the Apostle, be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant Mercy hath begotten Us again unto a lively Hope, by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead, To an Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for You; Who are kept by the Power of God thro' Faith unto Salvation, ready to be revealed in the last Time. Wherein Ye greatly*
rejoyce

rejoyce, tho' now for a Season, (if need be) Ye are in Heaviness thro' manifold Temptations; That the Trial of your Faith being much more precious than of Gold that perisheth, tho' It be tried with Fire, might be found unto Praise and Honour and Glory, at the Appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen Ye love, In Whom tho' now Ye see Him not, yet Believing Ye rejoyce with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory.

Indeed the Christian Faith is throughout the Whole System joyous and delightful. The End It proposes to Us is ravishing and glorious, and The Means It prescribes are salutary and beneficial. It represents the present Life as a Passage to a better, its Enjoyments as Earnests of more valuable Hopes, and even its Afflictions as Means of improving our Virtue and enhancing our final Recompence. The Sum of all its Doctrines and Precepts is either Delightful in itself, or made so by this Article, in Relation to the After-Scene of our Existence, and therefore in this View highly deserves our Attention, and will encrease our Regard to the Religion that blesses Us with it.

Whether This Article be Peculiar to this Revelation alone, whether the Heathen Philosophers or Jewish Teachers believed a future State of Recompence, or not, (tho' I am firmly

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ly perswaded that Both did) yet with Regard to the Clearness of the Representation, the Nature and Degree of its Glory, and more especially the Title to it, on which our Hopes are founded, in these Respects It is entirely Christian, and our Saviour may particularly be said to have brought *Life and Immortality to Light thro' the Gospel*. A Happy Futurity is not only taught by his Doctrine, but founded on his Merits, and purchased by his Blood, and All our Pretensions to it are built on the Propitiatory Oblation offered by Him to the Divine Justice, as an Atonement for our Transgressions. This is the Meritorious Cause of our Salvation; This is the true Ground of the Christian Triumph, for which alone even our forsaken Sins are pardoned, and our best Works accepted. Here We have a sure Claim, where Others have but an uncertain Hope. In this as well as Other Instances, our Faith excels the Efforts of unassisted Reason, and 'tis the great Privilege and Blessing of our Religion, that It opens to Us this gracious Method and System of Mercy, and gives Us upon our best Endeavours, tho' a more Humble, yet as secure a Title to Acceptance and Happiness, as if We had been Self-sufficient, and could have pleaded Original Righteousness. Our Saviour,
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the Scripture tells Us, *once suffered for Us* upon Earth, *the Just for the Unjust*, that He might bring Us to God, and to the same Purpose is now interceding for Us in Heaven, and tho' for that Reason, *now We see Him not, yet Believing in Him, We rejoyce with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory.* Justified by his Merits We can look up with Comfort, and Supported by his Promises We can look forward with Delight, and by Both can regard with Indifference the transitory Vanities and Troubles of this Life, fixing our Attention on that glorious Conclusion of them, which neither Force nor Fraud can deprive Us of, nor our most exalted Imaginations raise Us to a due Notion of its Value and Felicity.

And Is not This then a very Joyful Consideration? Would not Every Rational Person wish, that a Prospect so agreeable and delightful, might prove well-founded, and that our Hopes herein were secure and certain? Where then is the mighty Foundation for Triumph in the contrary Opinion, the extraordinary Satisfaction pretended in having detected this Error? We know indeed the Misery of this Opinion, because We know for certain the fatal Delusion that They are under, and that irreversibile Misery, that will one Day sadly convince

vince them. But I would at present rather consider the Unhappy State of an Infidel upon his own Principles, the uncomfortable Influence that the Disbelief of another World has and must necessarily have upon the Enjoyment of this. A Brief Consideration of which will at least evidence the little Reason He has to be so mightily pleased Himself with his imagined Discovery, or so studious to propagate it amongst Others. To this End I shall consider Him both as a Member of Society, and as a private Person, and in each View the Comfort and Desirableness of this Article of our Religion will appear, as the only tolerable Security from the Injuries of Others, the only sure Foundation for any personal Satisfaction.

As for the former, the Question is briefly this, whether Honesty, whether Virtue and Conscience are of any Service to Society, or whether It be more eligible to dwell amongst Those, who have no Restraint on their Passions, nor any Tie whatsoever to regard the Life and Welfare of Others. That Any Doubt concerning a future State is reducible to Atheism, or what is just the same to Us, to a Denial of Providence, is evident; and that upon the Disbelief of That, there cannot be

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either any Obligation to, or any sufficient Enforcement of Virtue, is equally certain. Even Natural Religion owes all its binding Force to the Consideration of the great Author of Nature. Reason Itself is not, properly speaking, the Ground of Obligation, but only the Means and Manner of discovering the Will of Him, whose Will We are in Duty bound to obey. Take away the Acknowledgment or Superintendence of that Being, to whom We owe our own, and We have certainly an uncontrollable Liberty over Ourselves and our Conduct. I might add, that upon this Atheistical Supposition, even the Reason of Things would bear a quite different Notion from what It does on Religious Principles, and a Man might argue as strongly for making his own private Interest the chief Rule and Principle of his Conduct, as for any other Scheme whatever. It will be the less necessary therefore to enlarge on the Insufficiency of every other Enforcement of Virtue. To omit many other material Exceptions to Each, there is this obvious and important Defect in them all, that They cannot prevent a secret Mischief. Where there is no Obligation on the Conscience, no Apprehension of a Superior Being, or a future Account, there It is plain, that there is
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no other Motive to an Honest Practice, than what arises from the Convenience or Inconvenience attending it. Now Human Laws may frequently by Force or Fraud be evaded; Reason may be neglected, silenced or perverted; and as for Honour, or a Regard to Reputation, where It is duly stated, It cannot affect our private Actions; and where It is not, as according to the present prevailing Notion of Honour, It is much otherwise, there This very Principle, which is to pass for a sufficient Restraint on Passion, is really in itself more mischievous and destructive, than any natural Passion in our Constitution.

And is not then the Infidel in a comfortable Situation upon his own Principles, and is not Society deeply indebted to Him for his Discovery? Is there not great Reason to triumph in such a Scheme, as would put Every One in *Ishmael's* Condition, of *having his Hand against Every Man, and Every Mans Hand against Him*, and would destroy the most effectual Restraint that Men lie under from the Worst of Injuries and Cruelties to Each Other? Particularly, Can It be Matter of Satisfaction to *Him*, to destroy the only Security for that Life, beyond which He claims no Prospect, or at least for the Happiness of it, against the
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Designs of Resentment, Interest, or any other vicious Motive? Or rather, Is not the general Welfare of the Publick, and therein Every Private Man's Happiness concerned, that Religious Principles should prevail, and that We should be influenced by Conscience in our Intercourse with Each Other? One would think, This must be acknowledged desirable, and even That very Supposition, that Religion was the Contrivance of crafty Priests and Politicians, according to the Language of our Times, is sufficient at least to prove this Point. To consider Him therefore no longer as a Member of Society, Let Us view Him in his Personal and Private Capacity, and observe on the Disbelief of the Christian Doctrine of another Life, what Foundation would be left for any Relish in the Enjoyments of this, or for any Remedy against the Afflictions of it.

As Man is compounded of two Parts, a Body and a Soul, All the Satisfaction that He is capable of, must arise either from the Pleasures of Sense or Reason. And as our present Constitution stands, Each of These require in some Degree the Gratification of Each Other, to make Either truly comfortable. Whilst our Souls are united to this Mass of Flesh and Blood, We cannot live comfortably merely upon

on shining Speculations, but are deeply interested in the Welfare of this inferior Part of Us, and tho' a thinking Man upon rational and religious Reflections may bear resignedly the Sufferings and Afflictions of it, yet Afflictions however They must be allowed to be at the present. Much less can the Pleasures of Sense only compleat the Felicity of a Creature distinguished by the superior Principle of Reason: Yet even This lowest View of Enjoyment is contradicted and defeated by the very Scheme, which is purposely calculated to promote it. For What is This unbounded Liberty of Practice gained by this Discovery, but in Effect a Licence to make Ourselves Miserable? Those Vices, which are forbidden by the Christian Law, are such as a Wise Man would shun for his own Sake, such as are as destructive of his present Happiness in this World, as They are of his Welfare in the Other according to the Doctrine of Christianity. What deplorable Objects are there in the World, reduced to the miserable Condition They are in, by the free Use of that uncontrouled Liberty, which They claim over Themselves and their Actions? How ruinous are the natural Effects of Debauchery, which is the very End and Aim of this Licentious Scheme? And would not Ev-

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ry Wise Man then even on the Motive of Interest only be desirous of being tied by the strictest Obligations from Practices, which are so fatally pernicious and destructive? Is it desirable, that We should lie under no Restraint from those strong and alluring Temptations, which if followed would unavoidably lead to Ruin and Misery?

Yet These Mischiefs consequent upon these pernicious Principles are still inconsiderable in Respect of Those, which It derives upon the Superior Part of our Composition. The Pains and Miseries, which It brings upon the Body, are small in Comparison of those more pungent Afflictions, which It necessarily creates to the Mind. For there is a Natural Desire of Immortality in Us, which all the Arts of Oblivion cannot blot out. And the very Importance of the Subject, if It was not natural, would awaken Every Thinking Man's Reflections. Whether We are to continue for ever in a future State, or must lay down our Beings with our Lives, is an Enquiry of so much Consequence, that Indifference concerning it is unnatural and astonishing. And here the Infidel embraces the dark Side of the Question, and professedly sets Himself on a Level with the Beasts that perish. The Prospect of Hereafter
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He freely disclaims, and concludes, that his Diffolution will prove the Extinction of his Being. And Is not even This a very terrifying Reflection, sufficient to render insipid and comfortless the best, the most fortunate Situation in this Life? Would not the Prospect of our own Annihilation annihilate even all our present Satisfaction? For What Relish could there be in the best Worldly Enjoyments to One, who knew not, but that the Next Moment might put an End to his Delights and to Himself? Would It not then be a Melancholy Consideration, that We should have Reason just to make Us capable of Superior Misery, and to distinguish Us from the Brute Part of the Creation by more afflictive Sufferings? Yet This is really the Case, if there be no future State of Retribution. For the Beasts are troubled with the Pains of Sense only, and consequently with those only, which are present. Having not the Power of any distant Reflection, They disturb not Themselves with past Sufferings, nor anticipate future ones by uneasy Presages. But Man, to make Him more compleatly wretched, is endued with the Power of Thought to aggravate the Sufferings, which now oppress Him, to renew the Smart of those which are past, by Memory and Reflection,

flection, and to forestall those which are to
 come, or which in Possibility only may happen
 hereafter. 'Tis true, the first Mention of the
 Christian Doctrine clears up every Difficulty of
 this Kind, and under the Prospect, which That
 affords Us, We can even *rejoyce with Joy un-
 speakable and full of Glory.* — But according to
 the Infidels boasted Scheme, This is the Uni-
 versal State of Mankind, to begin by Chance,
 live in Misery and end in Nothing. A most
 comfortable Opinion truly of our Creation,
 and a most encouraging Motive to give in to
 such inviting Scheme! Or seriously, Can there
 be a greater Principle of Horror and Uneasi-
 ness, more shocking to Nature and disquieting
 to Reason, than to believe, that our earnest
 Desire of Immortality will be defeated, and
 that We shall be hereafter, as tho' We had ne-
 ver been? Why as melancholy a Consideration
 as This is, there is still a more aggravative
 Circumstance of Affliction in this pretended
 Scheme of Satisfaction. For however It may
 in common Discourse be termed Infidelity, It
 can never amount to more than Scepticism.
 The Prejudices of Education, as Himself will
 call it, or as We with better Foundation, the
 Presages of Nature, will not suffer Him to go
 farther than Doubt on this Important Que-
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tion. He does not, He cannot, with all his other Absurdities and Contradictions, pretend to demonstrate on any Principle the Impossibility of this, and there are such weighty Evidences both from Reason and Revelation for it, as must stagger the most hardned and obstinate Infidel. But now in this Situation He is still more miserable. Annihilation is his best Hope, since either Nothing or Misery must be his Portion hereafter. Or could the Preference of these be possibly disputed, as Some indeed have pretended to call it in Question, yet Total Destruction or irreversible Damnation are at the best a very terrifying Dilemma. Uncertainty on the most important Event in the World, with the Expectation of so dreadful an Issue on every Side, must surely break thro' every inferior Thought, extinguish every pleasurable Enjoyment, and render Life itself a continual and intolerable Burden. Accordingly We frequently see these Unhappy Men discharge Themselves with their own Hands out of the Miserable State, which their Scepticism has brought them into, and cast Themselves into the Terrors of the other World, to avoid the Agonies of Doubt and Distrust in this. And indeed, It seems a much greater Wonder, that Suicide is not always, than that

It is so often the Consequence of Infidelity. For there is not Any Thing truly and for its own Sake valuable in this Life, but the Religious Expectation of Another; not even in our best Situation, when our Hopes are the least crossed, and our Fears the least fulfilled; much less in the frequent Afflictions of Life, against which there is no Remedy on this deplorable Scheme.

For an Infidel in Calamity is the most Miserable Creature, that Imagination can paint. There is no possible Ground of Consolation in his Case, but He is on every Side left *Destitute, Afflicted, Tormented*. Whenever Misfortune befalls Him, which will be no uncommon Case, whilst He continues amidst the Changes and Chances of this Mortal Life, then will his Thoughts be necessarily roused towards that, which will not bear Reflection. When the World proves troublesome and afflictive, when Friends become Deceitful, to what Refuge shall He fly, or with what comfortable Thought shall He support Himself, who has no Superior Friend to make his Appeal to, nor any comfortable Prospect of a Better Situation hereafter? Nay so Uneasy and self-contradictory a Thing is Scepticism, that Those, who in one rash Moment in an Agony of Despair, have attempted

tempted to destroy Themselves, have at all other Times been the most afraid of Death, of all Mankind, and as the Apostle expresses it, *through Fear thereof have continued all their Life-Time subject to Bondage.*

Having thus imperfectly illustrated, by a View of the Opposite Scheme, the Comfort and Desirableness of those Truths, which the Infidel takes such pretended Pleasure in exposing, I shall now improve what has been said on this Subject into some useful Inferences and Observations.

In the First Place then, This very Desirableness of our Religion is an high presumptive Proof of the Truth of it. For is the Acknowledgment of an After-State necessary to keep Society in tolerable Order, and Can We believe, that God has sent Man into the World a Sociable Creature, without those Restraints, which are necessary for a Creature in that Condition? If the Apprehension of a future Life be requisite to preserve the Peace and Welfare of this, certainly We cannot imagine, that an All-Wise Being has so ill provided for the Work of his own Hands, as to leave them without the necessary Means of their Well-Being. Thus again with Regard to a Man's private and personal Satisfaction. As the Acknow-

knowledge of a better Life hereafter can alone give Relish to any of the Enjoyments of this, or administer Comfort under the Afflictions of it, May We not securely infer, that there is such a State provided for Us, that Man was not sent into the World merely to inherit Vanity and Misery, without any Rule for his Conduct, or any better Prospect for his Encouragement; that the Desire of Immortality was not implanted in Him merely to torment Him, nor the Gift of Reason, as was before argued, bestowed on him only to perplex and disquiet Him, and to aggravate the more severely his unavoidable Afflictions? For are these Terms of Existence worthy the End of our Creation? Or could an All-Wise Being make Us for such a State only, as no Wise Man, could It before be offered Him, would without farther Expectations, accept of?

We may therefore Secondly, from the Desirableness of this great Article of our Religion, infer the Folly of Infidels, both in that unnatural Joy, which They pretend to Themselves, in that terrifying Scheme, which They have formed, and in their unaccountable Diligence and Industry to promote such dreadful Principles amongst Others. For is there now any Foundation for Joy and Satisfaction in
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having cut off the Hopes of Immortality, and consequently in that contemptible Account and Notion, which the Infidel gives You of Himself? For Such an One upon his own Principles is a most despicable Animal. According to his own Account of Himself, his present Existence He owes entirely to Chance, and expects no more than to have it extinguished with the Loss of his Breath. An End indeed very suitable to such an Original! How He came hither, He cannot certainly tell, but This He is most Secure of, that He is to go no farther, tho' One would imagine, that This should be at least as doubtful as the Other. For It may be observed after all, that even the utmost Extent of the Atheists own Scheme would not conclude absolutely against a future State. Another World may altogether as well be made by Chance as this, and We may happen once more to come into Being, by the same lucky Concourse of Atoms that sent Us hither at first. Thus however in his own Esteem, He is the Child of Fortune, and the Servant of Fate, Inconsiderable in Life and Nothing in Death. But now Is not This a very terrifying Account of Human Nature? Is it not such an One, as must rather shock than delight a Creature endued with the Power of Reflection? Is it a
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Matter of Pleasure and Triumph, that This Scene of Vanities is to bound our Prospect, and that We are to look for Nothing better hereafter? Is This degrading Scheme a serious Ground of Consolation, and can It be a joyful Reflection, that Man should be so inconsiderable a Creature? Why as if it were really thus, We see them continually exulting, upon having thus argued Themselves out of Being, and valuing Themselves highly upon having seen farther than Others into their own Insignificancy: But the Pleasure of having made so mortifying a Discovery is what No Wise Man will envy Them.

But if the Infidel be self-condemned in that boasted Satisfaction, which He pretends to take in his own Scheme, Are not his industrious Endeavours to propagate it amongst Others still more irrational and unaccountable? For upon what Motive is This undertaken? The Great Truths of Christianity, or these Vulgar Errors, as He esteems them, are however beneficial to Society, and highly contributive to the Peace and Satisfaction of every Private Person. Our Holy Religion, to place it at the lowest, without Regard to its infallible Evidence and Truth, is however a desirable Scheme, necessary to give Us any firm Security

ty from Others, or any real Comfort in Ourselves. To what End then are these studious Pains to banish out of Mens Minds a Sense of Religion, and consequently to undermine the Foundations of all publick Justice and all Personal Satisfaction? On what imaginable Motive can This Conduct be justified, or even accounted for? Or what could possibly be the Consequence of the End They aim at, but Universal Misery, Ruin and Confusion? Very different and commendable are the Christian's Motives in propagating his Faith, even waving the absolute and infallible Certainty of it. When We offer to convert an Unbeliever, We offer to shew Him an easy Path to endless Happiness, by such Principles as shall contribute as much to his present Peace as future Felicity; such as shall supply Him with Consolation in all the Distresses of Life, and enable Him to overcome the Fear of Death. We offer to convince Him of his own Interest, to teach Him, what We believe will be infinitely profitable for Him; to remove Him from tormenting Doubts to satisfactory Hopes, from dangerous Errors to saving Knowledge. And This must be confessed to be a very charitable Attempt, if It was not founded on such unquestionable Evidence, as It is. But now the Infidel can have

no such Motive to propagate the Unhappy Principles He has fallen into. He cannot insinuate any Danger in the Belief of Christianity : He cannot deny but that It is at least a desirable Scheme. When He weakly attempts to object to it, He attempts not only contrary to Duty and Reason, but also contrary even to our private Satisfaction, to remove Us from a comfortable fixed Faith to a dreadful State of Doubt and Distrust. He would persuade Us out of our joyful Expectation of Eternal Bliss, and in Return for this He does not pretend to offer any settled Form of Belief, grounded on clearer Proofs, or established on better Promises. He would leave Us in such Principles, as would make Us Enemies to One Another, would destroy the Peace and Comfort of our Minds, would make Us live with Uneasiness in this World, and send Us out of it in a deplorable Uncertainty. — But tho' the Security of Others calls on Us to expose duly the Mischief of these Principles, Let Us however be careful to distinguish as We ought, betwixt their Errors and their Persons; and whilst We are magnifying the One, in order to excite in Ourselves a just Abhorrence of them, Let Us charitably and earnestly recommend the Other to the tender Mercies of a Long-suffering God ;
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whose Grace alone can defeat those industrious Endeavours; whereby They seem to be fortifying Themselves against a Possibility of Conviction; and Let Us remain assured, that They are really the greatest Objects of Compassion, that can present Themselves to Us.

The Desireableness of Religion however teaches Us Thirdly, to rejoice in the Light of our Holy Faith; and to be immoveably constant to it. For as It was briefly observed at the Entrance of this Discourse, the Infidel's chief Strength stands in the Pleasure and Satisfaction, which his Prospect vainly promises Him. It cannot stand before Reason and Argument, and It never could prevail, were It not for that false Appearance of Comfort and Indulgence, which It carries with it. Consider it then in this just Light, and if ever You are assaulted with Temptations of this Kind, Bear this honest Prejudice in your Minds against it, that You are going to be betrayed into the most deplorable and comfortless Situation, and to be cut off from every Hope and Consolation, that can administer any Rational Delight. View it not barely in the fancied Pleasure of that Indulgence of your Lusts and Passions, which it will allow You in, but take Time to consider this Scheme in all its Parts, and You

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will see it made up of Perplexity, Misery and Terror. Even the very Temptation to it ought to be a sufficient Antidote against it, for it were Misery enough to be let loose to our own Passions and the fatal Consequences of Them; yet That is indeed the best Side of this melancholy Prospect, the least of all the many Miseries attending it. Under this View, and an impartial One it is, there will be no Temptation to Apostacy, no Kind of Motive to desert the comfortable Profession We have been baptized into. Under this justifiable Prepossession in its Favour, Let the Evidences of Religion be fairly examined, and fully judged of, and They will ever shine upon the Test, and appear the brighter and more satisfactory. This likewise We are principally to remember, that Difficulties are no Arguments against Demonstrations, and that We are perplexed with infinitely fewer of these under the Christian Religion, than under the Infidel's Scheme, which is wholly made up of Doubts, Difficulties and Uncertainties. *O come then, Let Us sing unto the Lord, Let Us heartily rejoice in the Strength of our Salvation.* Let Us reflect with Satisfaction on the comfortable Influence of the Christian Doctrine, which has in every Article advanced our mutual and personal

nal Happiness; which with Regard to One Another, has bound the Duties of Justice and Honesty on our Consciences, not on any weak and precarious Motive, but by that strict Account, which We shall hereafter give, and that suitable Recompence which We shall receive: Which with Respect to our own Comfort has by the Revelation of a future State dissipated those momentous Doubts and Difficulties, which before darkned and disordered the Human Mind, and by the Welfare of that important Condition has tied Us to the Practice of those Virtues, which are naturally contributive to our present Peace and Satisfaction; which by that glorious Prospect, which It has given Us beyond the Grave, has made Us the more to value our present Situation, and yet the less unwilling to leave it; to relish the little Enjoyments of it without uneasy Reflection, and to bear the many Calamities thereof with joyful and weighty Consolation. — In a Word, to be more cheerful in Prosperity, and less dejected in Adversity, and to be better pleased and satisfied both with our Continuance in Life, and our Deliverance out of it.

It may be Seasonable and Pertinent to observe Fourthly, the Excellence and Benefits of that Ministry, by which these joyful profitable Sa-
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ving Truths are communicated and confirmed to the World; to vindicate our Holy Function, and to shew, that with Regard to the Interest as well as Duty of Mankind, We are not That Prejudicial, are not That Useless Set of Men represented, whilst We neither pervert the Design nor exceed the Bounds of our Office. Thus *St. Paul* applies a suitable Quotation from the Evangelical Prophet. *Rom. 10. 14, 15.* Speaking of the joyful Truths of the Gospel He goes on, *How shall They believe in Him of whom They have not heard, and how shall They hear without a Preacher, and how shall They preach except They be sent? As it is written, How Reautiful are the Feet of them, that preach the Gospel of Peace and bring Glad Tidings of Good Things?* To the same Purpose the same Apostle elsewhere significantly expresses the Nature of this Office. *2 Cor. 1. 24.* *We have not Dominion over your Faith, but are Helpers of your Joy.* The Doctrine, which We are commissioned to preach, is such as alone can give Value to Existence, such as only can regulate our Passage thro' this World, or afford it a joyful Conclusion. It is jointly profitable in our Civil and our Religious Capacity, would compose the lesser Differences, and prevent all greater, and if faithfully applied and universally

fally practised, would make this Earth as well an Emblem of Heaven, as a proper Preparative for it. — And if there be then any Truth in the joyful Prospect We have been taking, if any Evidence for those beneficial Precepts and glorious Promises, which Christianity sets before Us; If the Welfare of Mankind be deeply interested in the Belief and Practice of the Gospel, The very First Reflection on their Nature and Situation may convince Us, that This Design could not have been carried on and continued without such Appointment of a regular standing Ministry, to instruct the Ignorant, confirm the Wavering, confute the Gain-sayers, admonish the Negligent, and remind Every One of the Certainty and Importance of their Salvation. By the due Discharge of our Office We add at once to the Reformation and the Welfare of Mankind, and are Instrumental to that great End of the Gospel Itself, their Improvement in Holiness and Happiness. We alleviate the Care of the Civil Magistrate, and often prevent We hope the most disagreeable Part of his Office, the Infliction of Punishment, by preventing the Offences to which It is justly due. He can only have Influence on the outward Actions, and that only by the Fear of Vengeance, whilst We apply immediately to the

the Heart with the joint Motives of Rewards and Penalties, and can win Them to Duty by the Engaging Prospect of *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*. And whilst We are thus employed, We are doing the best Service to the World, and have a just Title, according to St. Paul's Direction, to be *esteemed in Love for our Works Sake*. If We may not plead the Authority of our Office, yet surely the Influence and Effect of it should recommend Us to all the Lovers of Virtue and Friends to Civil Government. And where Those Interests are rightly understood, and really espoused, We shall not fail of Encouragement, whatever private Slander or publick Insults We may be liable to from the different Extremes of Hypocrisy and Prophaneness. It is our great Concern, that We display the Good Effects of our Office, by a sincere and zealous Discharge of it, that We give no Offence in Any Thing, that the Ministry be not blamed, much more, that We do not by any real Misapplication of our Function bring Scandal and Hatred on it; that We *preach not Ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord*, and make not the Gospel of Peace the Instrument of Confusion: in a Word, that No Views of Interest, Popularity or Applause prevail with Us to stifle seasonable Truths, nor to meddle with

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Points foreign to our Profession; the true Intent of which, was to inculcate Moral Practices upon Religious Principles; to point out to Men the Path to their true Happiness, and to exhort Them earnestly to continue in it; to deliver Them by the Rules of Piety and Virtue from the severest Part of Affliction, and to support them in such as unavoidably happens, by the delightful Prospect of a joyful Futurity, where Pain and Trouble and Sorrow shall be no more.

Fifthy and Lastly, The Desireableness of this fundamental Doctrine of Christianity is an earnest Motive to an Holy and Virtuous Life. For as Nothing but the Christian Faith in this Article can make our Abode here truly comfortable, so neither will our Faith avail to this End, without a suitable and Christian Conversation. The Future Happiness revealed in the Gospel is every where taught to be conditional; and tho' our meritorious Title to it, is founded on the Virtue of another, yet our own is also necessary for the Application of it to our Benefit. But is not then the general Indifference of Christians as to their Conduct as terrifying and self-inconsistent, as the Infidel's boasted Satisfaction in his mean Opinion of Himself? Nay Is it not rather more contradictory?

tradiçtory? For the Former acts as He professes, and lives like that contemptible Creature He takes Himself to be. Having disclaimed all Pretensions to Another World, He confines his Views and Thoughts, as much as He can to this, and so far at least He is intelligible in his Conduct. But the Immoral Christian acts as He does, though He thinks otherwise, and whilst He professes to abominate his Principles, lives just as He would do, if He acknowledged them. The Distinction lies not in any Difference in their outward Behaviour, but in the Motive only, on which They act, (to the Advantage of which Side I will not determine) the One being actually Self-condemned, whilst the Other pretends to justify his Conduct upon Principle. But fatal will be the Effect of Immorality, whatever be the Cause, whether It be committed against the Dictates of a well-guided Conscience, or by the Licence of a misperswaded One. To what End then, or of what Avail is all our Heat and Zeal in Speculation, if We continue Irreligious in Practice? Should We contend never so earnestly for this comfortable Faith, and defend it never so justly and learnedly, yet shall We ruin all our Hopes by a vicious Life, and sink Ourselves the deeper in the Pit of Destruction, by transgressing

gressing against so much Light and Knowledge. Orthodoxy of Belief will not atone for, but aggravate the Guilt of a sinful Conduct; for tho' vain are all the Pretences of Morality without Religion, yet neither will the Profession of Christianity avail unto Salvation, unless It shine forth in our Lives and Conversations by the exemplary Practice of Virtue and Morality. The Design of this Heavenly Doctrine was to afford Us the strongest Motives to make Us better Men, and to bring Us to Happiness by no other Means than that of Holiness. Remember then, that That comfortable Prospect, opened to Us in this Revelation, requires still our own Care to make it truly a Matter of Joy and Satisfaction to Us; and Let Us, my Brethren, whose particular Office It is to declare these Things to Others, be particularly careful to apply them to Ourselves. The Difficulties, which We lie under in the Discharge of our Ministry, need not now be insisted on. They are plainly seen, and severely felt, and were never perhaps greater in every Respect, since the Civil Establishment of our Religion. But as We have been hitherto viewing it in the amiable View of its Enforcements and Encouragements, Let Us continue this Application for our own Personal

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Piety and Virtue, from the Happy Assistances, which our Profession particularly affords Us. — Now Whatever outward Disadvantages It is attended with, yet certainly our Office is in itself most acceptable and delightful, for That which is the Ornament of Human Nature is the Peculiar Business of our Profession, namely; to study the Ways of God, and to be instrumental to the Salvation of Men. The joyful Object of the Christian Hope is the daily Subject of our Meditation, and whilst We are preparing for the Instruction of our People, We are thereby continually presenting an agreeable and useful Remembrance to Ourselves. The great Causes of the Ruin of Mankind are Ignorance and Inattention: A Want of a proper Conviction of the Truth and Importance of Religion, or an entire Disregard to Things of this Nature, thro' the Hurry of Business or Pleasure. But We are happily delivered by the Nature of our Profession from these Occasions of Transgression. It is our proper Employment to be always looking into and explaining the Grounds both of Natural and Revealed Religion, which will ever shine to the Greatest Advantage upon the strictest and most impartial Examination. And the deeper Conviction We are under of the
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Certainty of that glorious Prospect which We set before Mankind, the weaker of Course will all Temptations appear, which by vain and inconsiderable Allurements would interrupt Us in the Pursuit of so desireable and so necessary an End. Did Men in earnest believe what They profess, and seriously attend to what They believe, They could not certainly under the actual Reflection, contentedly give up the Hope of future Happiness, to gain a present Pleasure or relieve a present Distress. It is Neglect and Inconsideration only, which ruins all true Believers, but this Occasion of Iniquity likewise We are delivered from. Every Day is a Sabbath or Day of Rest to Us. We are peculiarly set apart for this Purpose, and have dedicated our whole Time to the Service of God, and thereby indeed to the true Service of Ourselves and our Fellow-Creatures. Every Argument We offer to convince them of the Truth, or to press them to the Practice of Religion, must awaken our own Hearts, and warm Us with a true Sense of Duty, and our Thoughts must often be revolving the most important and most affecting Subjects in every Composition intended for their Service. — And as Every Instance of Piety and Duty confirms the general Habit, and leads to higher

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Improvements, our necessary Attendance on the Publick Offices of Religion, and above all, That which is now almost generally neglected in other Families, but still I hope, kept up in all ours, That of United constant daily Devotion, These are strong Assistances in the Support of our Virtue, and great Helps towards the great End of our Being as well as of our Profession. Farther the Restraints, which the Canons of the Church have wisely provided, with Respect to Habit and other Particulars, and even Those which Prudent Custom has laid on Us in Abstinence from Publick Diversions, are Preservatives from Temptation, and Nothing ought to be considered as Little, which has a real Tendency to that End. Even the Disadvantages We lie under, are in this Respect of Use, and the more Crosses We have to wean Us from the Love of this World, the stronger Motives have We to set our Affections on Things above, and to place all our Hopes, where They cannot be disappointed, if We are but faithful to Ourselves. Those Disadvantages are to a Pious Mind more than compensated by these Means and Opportunities of Spiritual Improvement, and when We look to the Prospect of *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*, We cannot be sensible

fible enough of the Blessing of a Calling, which immediately forwards Us in the Attainment of it, and delivers Us from the usual Impediments to it. For as much and as justly as We complain of the Corruption of the World, We are not Witnesses to the Worst Part of it. Our Presence is a Check to their Excesses, and our Profession excuses Us from partaking in Pursuits of a dangerous or but of a suspicious Aspect. If we would preserve the Esteem of the Worst, as well as of the Better Part of Mankind, It must be by an uniform Deportment suitable to the End which We profess to have in View; and None would be more ready to censure and ridicule undue Compliances in a Clergyman, than Those, who would be most forward to tempt Him to it. The Reputation of our Office preserves Us from *many* Occasions of Offence, and is itself preserved only by an entire Abstinence from *All*; and the Regard of the World, as well as the Applause of our own Conscience and the Favour of the great Searcher of it, will all be conciliated only by an exemplary Life and a Conduct answerable to the high Doctrine that We preach. — These my Brethren are Some of the Felicities of our Station and Employment, which besides the Sacredness of our Office, the
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solemn Professions, which We made at our Ordination, and the Influence of our Example on the Rest of Mankind, tie Us to higher Degrees of Holiness Ourselves, and more zealous Concern to promote the same Spirit in Others. If We are in Earnest in the Discharge of our Duty, We shall still meet with some Success and Satisfaction in the Pursuit of it, and many Opportunities of Doing Good will then present Themselves, which pass unobserved to a less zealous Mind. Though the Contradiction of Sinners may sometimes make Us Uneasy, tho' It cannot but grieve Us to see Some seriously disputing against their own Interest, Others lightly sacrificing their future Hopes to the Pleasantry of a Jest, and a far greater Number disregarding in their Conduct, the only Thought worth living for, yet the Consciousness of a sincere Endeavour to stop these Evil Principles and Practices will be some Consolation at present, and the Reward of such Endeavour will make Us Eternally Happy hereafter. Then Those, whom We have won over to a true Sense of their best Interest, Those whom We have brought back to a Right Faith by Reason and Argument, to a Regular Practice by Admonition and Persuasion, and to both by the Force of a Good Example,

ample, shall be our Happy Witnesses at the great Day, and in their own Title to a Glorious Sentence will evidence and enhance theirs, who were the Blessed Instruments of their Recovery and Reformation. For as the Apostle expresses it. *1 Thess. 2. 19. What is our Hope and Joy and Crown of Rejoycing? Are not even Those in the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his Coming,* who have been converted by our Labours to the Belief or the Practice of his Religion? May This Reflection not only have its Weight with Us in these occasional Meditations, but be the settled fixed Principle of our whole Conduct; that so when We come hereafter to give an Account of our Stewardship, *We may do it with Joy and not with Grief,* with Joy that We have faithfully discharged this Important Office Ourselves, and with Joy that We have thereby successfully contributed to the Salvation of Others.

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